

10 April 2019

Mr Graeme Atkins  
Executive Headteacher  
Queen Elizabeth High School  
Whetstone Bridge Road  
Hexham  
Northumberland  
NE46 3JB

Dear Mr Atkins

### **Short inspection of Queen Elizabeth High School**

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 2019 with Alexandra Hook and John McNally, Ofsted Inspectors, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since your predecessor school was judged to be good in November 2015.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your highly determined leadership underpins your pursuit of high standards. You, your head of school and other senior leaders lead by example. You are all determined to provide a high-quality educational experience for all pupils, regardless of their ability or background. As a result, the ethos that permeates the school enables a high proportion of pupils to make exceptional progress and attain highly over time. However, you and other senior leaders, including trustees, recognise that some disadvantaged pupils' outcomes and attendance need to urgently improve. Consequently, you have clear plans in place so that these priority areas are addressed with swiftness and vigour.

You and other leaders have created an inclusive school community that is underpinned by strong pastoral care and safeguarding of pupils' welfare. As a result, pupils' behaviour is excellent. They are courteous and respectful towards each other and visitors. Pupils enjoy coming to school and told inspectors that they feel that teachers care about them and will support them if they have a worry or concern. You have placed high priority on pupils' well-being and their personal development, particularly social, emotional and mental health support. Pupils are self-assured. They can confidently express their opinions and ideas. A high number of parents who responded to the survey are positive about the school. Most agree that their children are happy, safe and well looked after.

Leaders carefully monitor pupils' progress. This ensures that any pupil who may be

falling behind with their studies is quickly identified. Some pupils benefit from additional help and support that is provided to help them catch up. For example, specific groups have been identified so that pupils can access additional, bespoke, support in English and mathematics. Leaders' information regarding current pupils' progress and learning indicates that a high proportion of pupils continue to make substantial and sustained progress across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Despite this, while showing signs of improvement, the progress of some disadvantaged pupils remains variable in comparison to that of other pupils.

Trustees provide a strong level of challenge and support to you and other leaders. They are well informed and examine information provided to them thoroughly so that the most pertinent questions can be asked. As a result, they have a sound understanding of the school's many strengths, but also a candid understanding of those areas needing urgent improvement. Trustees are highly skilled and take a reflective approach to their roles. Like you, they care deeply about the school and the community it serves.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders and trustees ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff and trustees' training is regular, relevant and up to date. All records contain relevant information and detail. The school's single central register is meticulously kept. There is a culture of vigilance and support across the school to ensure that pupils remain safe.

Pupils who responded to the online questionnaire, and also those who spoke to inspectors, said that they feel safe in school. They understand the different forms of bullying that can take place. Pupils are confident that on the rare occasion that bullying may happen if they speak to an adult it will be dealt with.

The personal, social, health and economic education programme prepares pupils effectively for managing risk and their own safety. Pupils are articulate when discussing equality and how people should be treated with respect. However, some pupils in the main school, and students in the sixth form, did mention to inspectors how they would welcome more opportunities to explore topics in further detail as they progress throughout the school, particularly relating to mental health issues.

### **Inspection findings**

- During the inspection, a key line of enquiry which inspectors focused on was around how leaders' actions were contributing to improvements in the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils currently in the school. This was particularly the case taking into account the historical underachievement of disadvantaged pupils.
- Inspectors looked closely at the progress made by current disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have initiated a range of strategies to raise their achievement. These are starting to pay off. For example, bespoke mentoring for individual and small groups of disadvantaged pupils is benefiting them socially and emotionally.

Furthermore, it is providing pupils with the opportunity to engage with additional support and guidance that is enabling them to make better gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding, particularly so in English and mathematics.

- Leaders are working alongside a colleague in each subject area, who is a designated 'champion' for disadvantaged pupils. This has given some staff the opportunity to reflect on the educational experience and barriers disadvantaged pupils may face in their subject. To date, an audit has been completed so that leaders have an overview of strategies employed, but also where additional support is needed. However, leaders' efforts to rapidly improve disadvantaged pupils' outcomes are yet to be consistently responded to by all staff.
- The quality of teaching is characterised by strong subject knowledge and planned activities designed to consolidate and, in the main, develop pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. For a high proportion of pupils this is allowing them to make strong gains in the subjects they study. Nonetheless, the quality of teaching, and therefore learning, for some disadvantaged pupils is inconsistent. While trustees and senior leaders have a clear understanding of the barriers disadvantaged pupils face, this is yet to be recognised in a strategic or coherent way by teachers. As a result, in some instances, teaching does not meet the varying barriers or needs that some disadvantaged pupils face. Likewise, there are times when teachers check pupils' work but do not identify or tackle common misconceptions or errors, for example the spelling of subject-specific vocabulary. When this is the case, gaps in pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills are prolonged over time. Senior leaders and trustees are well aware of how important it is to continue work so that improvements in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are rapid and sustained.
- Inspectors looked closely at the quality of sixth-form provision. Sixth-form leadership is a strength. For example, additional support for staff in certain subjects has brought about an improvement in students' outcomes. Students make good progress in the sixth form because they have excellent attitudes to learning and work hard. Students benefit from effective careers advice, information and guidance. This assists them to make informed choices about their future and next steps.
- The quality of teaching across this phase of the school, in the main, provides students with opportunities to develop their ideas about subject-specific concepts and ideas. This prepares them well for examinations. A minority of teaching does not challenge students to think deeply or hard about concepts or ideas. Despite this, students achieve well over time.
- Inspectors looked at leaders' actions to improve pupils' attendance. Most pupils attend school regularly. This reflects how they value the education being provided to them. Nonetheless, so far, this academic year rates of absence have increased, particularly so for disadvantaged pupils, and the number of pupils who are persistently absent, particularly those who are disadvantaged, has risen. However, leaders and trustees acknowledge that further, strategic, work is needed to address this issue fully so that the impact of leaders' work is sustained on a long-term basis.
- Undoubtedly, when pupils' absence is high they underachieve. This is particularly

so for some disadvantaged pupils currently. While leaders are developing more individualised support and approaches to improve attendance, parents and carers must play their part to ensure that their children attend as regularly as they should.

- Leaders' persistent and determined actions to improve attendance, such as communicating with parents and carers frequently and rewarding pupils for good attendance, are beginning to bear fruit. Despite this, leaders need to continually check the impact of their actions even closer so that a higher proportion of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, attend school regularly in order that they have every opportunity to meet their full potential.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- monitoring and evaluation activities iron out inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, particularly so where the barriers disadvantaged pupils face are not being addressed with sufficient consideration or rapidity, so that all pupils, and students in the sixth form, make substantial and sustained progress over time
- work to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence continues, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, and leaders continually reflect on and evaluate the impact of their actions.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northumberland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Darren Stewart  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

The inspectors held meetings with you, your head of school, senior and middle leaders and a group of staff. Inspectors also met with a group of trustees. The inspection team observed pupils' and students' learning in a range of different lessons in the main school and sixth form. Most of this learning was observed jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and around the school. They spoke with pupils informally and met formally with groups of pupils from Years 9, 10 and 11 and a group of students from Years 12 and 13. In addition, inspectors also completed detailed work scrutinies. They looked at a range of work from pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, in the main school and a sample of work from students in the sixth form. Inspectors considered and evaluated a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding and child

protection, pupils' behaviour and the school's single central record. They also considered documents relating to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Inspectors considered the views of 189 parents given on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 136 free-text responses. Inspectors also took into account 103 pupil responses and 90 staff responses from those who completed Ofsted's online questionnaires.